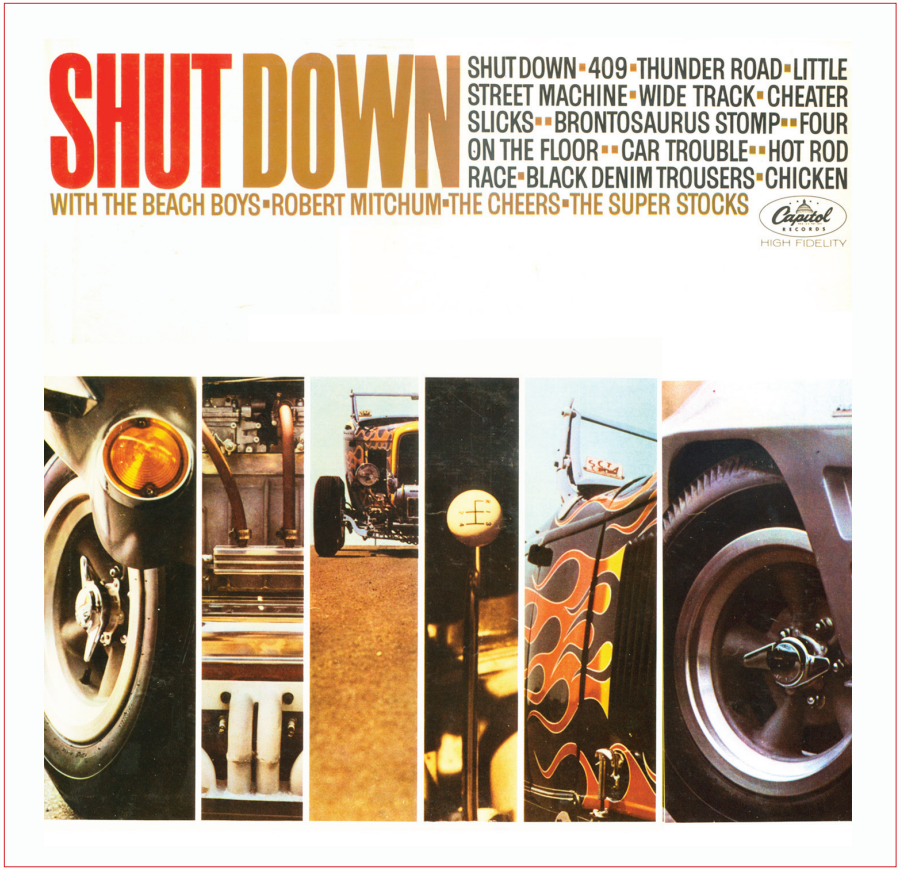
SHUT DOWN
SHUT DOWN • 409 • THUNDER ROAD • LITTLE STREET MACHINE • WIDE TRACK • CHEATER SLICKS • • BRONTOSAURUS STOMP • • FOUR ON THE FLOOR • • CAR TROUBLE • • HOT ROD RACE • BLACK DENIM TROUSERS • CHICKEN
WITH THE BEACH BOYS • ROBERT MITCHUM • THE CHEERS • THE SUPER STOCKS
Capitol RECORDS
HIGH FIDELITY

SHUT DOWN

In 1963 The Beach Boys were on a roll releasing a string of top charting albums in rapid succession: Surfin' USA, Surfer Girl, Little Deuce Coupe followed by 1964's Shut Down Volume 2….wait a minute…whatever happened to Shut Down Volume 1? That's a mystery that has kept many beach Boys fans scratching their heads wondering about the apparent hole in their record collections. The fact is there was a Shut Down Volume 1 and it did feature the Beach Boys, only it wasn't exactly a Beach Boys album.

Cut back to 1963. With the success of the Beach Boy's latest single "Surfin' U.S.A," radio stations were eager to fill their listeners' demands for more Beach Boys music. With no follow-up single yet planned by Capitol, so many DJs began spinning the single's flip side, a song about hot rod racing called "Shut Down," that it began charting. Capitol's A& R department took this as a call to action.

For several months Capitol had been concerned that the band they had labeled "the no.1 surfing group in the country" might become pigeonholed to a surf craze whose days they felt were soon to be numbered by a burgeoning hot rod craze. Logic seemed to be on Capitol's side. There were a lot more kids driving cars than surfing waves. Why even the surfers needed cars to get to the waves.

Up until now the Beach Boys' car songs had been confined to B-sides and deep album tracks. Now with a surprise hit about hot rodding on their hands Capitol were ready to place their bet on this next fad, so they raced to compile an album of car songs titled after the Beach Boy's latest radio hit. Shut Down's liner notes beckoned record buyers to: "listen to Shut Down …You can almost smell the rubber burn! This is a romping, road searing album that's titled after the current high-riding hit by the Beach Boys. The seven different vocal groups, instrumentalists and individual singing stars heard in the album offer selections which have become lasting hits renditions of songs about the fun, thrills and excitement of the road."

Like a huge wave at Waimea, Shut Down literally wiped out surf rock's momentum, reaching #7 in the album charts, and kick-started a whole new field of hot rod singles and compilation LPs. While Capitol was pleased, the Beach Boys weren't exactly happy. Not only had their current radio hit been used to craft an album without their knowledge, but Capitol's engineers had even added hot rod sound effects to the beginning of "Shut Down." Over the years this version has become a real rarity for Beach Boys' fans as it has never been appeared outside this long out-of-print 1963 vinyl LP.

Despite their initial reaction, The Beach Boys saw Shut Down's impact on record buyers and raced out their own car themed Little Deuce Coupe album to stores in record time -- just one month after having released their Surfer Girl album. Then in a move that seemingly buried any ill feelings they may have had towards Capitol, the Beach Boys titled their very next album Shut Down Volume 2.

While the two Beach Boys' tracks were the calling card for Shut Down, a highlight of the album was the inclusion of four new recordings co-written and produced by Gary Usher who, along with Brian Wilson, would become synonymous with creating the "California sound." Usher had been a musician for a number of years, and after being introduced to Brian Wilson would soon begin a musical collaboration that included several Beach Boys songs including "In My Room," "The Lonely Sea" and "409." Usher was also a car fa-

natic who often spent his weekends drag racing at the San Fernando Airport Dragstrip which led to a friendship with KFWB disc jockey Roger Christian who would go on to write songs with Usher, Brian Wilson and Jan Berry of Jan and Dean.

As Usher's experience grew, he became involved every in step of the record making process, from composing to recording, putting together a series of "groups" made up of hired vocalists and studio musicians who would perform his creations fashioning a role for himself that could best be described as "producer as artist." So when Capitol needed songs to fill up Shut Down, Usher's association with music, cars and the Beach Boys made him the perfect choice. These four Super Stocks tracks co-written with Roger Christian are the very first recordings issued under Usher's studio creation that would eventually lead to three albums by this "group": Thunder Road, Surf Route 101, School Is a Drag. Each track is a prime example of the catchy, car-themed music at whose height in the early '60s would have Usher recording no less than 50 hot rod songs he had co-written with Roger Christian in the space of one month.

Delving further into Shut Down you'll easily notice the similarity between The Cheers' "Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots" and Bert Convy's "Chicken." That's because not only are these the same songs with different lyrics but they are performed by the same group. The Cheers' were among just a handful of early white rock 'n' roll groups to make an impact on the charts in the mid-1950s. One of their biggest hits was "Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots," an early Leiber & Stoller composition whose remarkably varied life included a Chris Spedding recording 40 years after The Cheer's hit and even an Edith Piaf version titled "L'Homme A La Moto."

The Cheers' single reached #6 on the charts in 1955 and so a year later The Cheers looked to capitalize on their hit, by recording the same song with newly written lyrics titled "Chicken" about the teenage car dare game popularized in the film "Rebel Without A Cause." The likely reason Capitol changed the song credit on "Chicken" to Cheers' singer Bert Convy was that at the time of Shut Down's release The Cheers had long since split up and Bert Convy, whose vocals were more prominent on "Chicken," was well into his new career as a television personality. There appears to have been some confusion in this switch for while the record album's label credits Bert Convy, the LP's sleeve authentically credits The Cheers. Convy's good looks and pleasant demeanor eventually led him to become a ubiquitous television game show panelist in the '60s and '70s on the programs "Password," "What's My Line," "To Tell The Truth," with him eventually winning an Emmy in 1977 for Best Game Show Host for "Tattletales."

Television may have also played a role in the curious inclusion of The Piltdown Men's stone-age titled, "Brontosaurus Stomp" on a hot rod compilation. Named after the most famous archeological frauds of the 20th century, The Piltdown Men were put together by two men closely associated with vocal group The Four Preps: founding member Ed Cobb, and arranger Lincoln Mayorga. The rest of the group was comprised of mainstays of Hollywood's session musicians who played on many popular recordings of the time including many of Frank Sinatra's Capitol albums. While there would be line-up changes over the years "Brontosaurus Stomp" featured Bob Bain (guitarist on many Henry Mancini's soundtracks including "Breakfast At Tiffany's"), saxophonists Scott Gordon and Jackie Kelso (who played with Nelson Riddle and Duke Ellington), and Tommy Tedesco who has come to be regarded as the most recorded guitarist in history, playing on recordings for artists as diverse as Ella Fitzgerald, The Beach Boys, Elvis Presley and Cher. The reason for The Piltdown Men's inclusion on Shut Down was likely due to ongoing popularity of The Flintstones television show whose association with The Piltdown Men had occurred through a combination of coincidence and good fortune when the release of the "Brontosaurus Stomp" single in 1960 occurred right when he first season The Flintstones television show was gaining popularity. The Piltdown Men would further cement this relationship to TV's "the modern stone age family" with the follow-up single "Goodnight Mrs. Flintstone."

The oldest track on Shut Down is regarded as the very first hot rod song ever recorded. Written in 1950, "Hot Rod Race" is a great western swing composition that became so popular that within a year no less than four recorded versions hit the charts. One of the best versions is by "Ramblin' Jimmie Dolan, who at the time was known as "America's Cowboy Troubadour" and would later be seen as a seminal figure in rockabilly music. The importance of "Hot Rod Race" is apparent when you consider that it appeared several months prior to Jackie Brenston's "Rocket 88," the song many musicologists consider to be the first rock 'n' roll song ever recorded.

"The Ballad Of Thunder Road" was Robert Mitchum's musical tie-in to the film Thunder Road which Mitchum not only starred in but also wrote and was the executive producer for. This 1958 movie about moonshine runners who try to out run Treasury agents across state lines with their roadsters remained such a money making staple of the southern drive-in circuit for two decades after release that its home video version was delayed for over twenty years. The song itself which Mitchum both sings and wrote the music for actually charted and went on to become a southern jukebox fixture.

Finally, the dearth of car-themed tracks available at the time may be responsible for the inclusion of the Eligibles 1959 single "Car Trouble," a song more about the consequentions of running out of gas on a date than hot rodding. The Elgibles were a short-lived vocal group whose formidable talents as backing vocalists on several of country singer Sonny James' tracks including "Young Love" live on while their own recordings have fallen into obscurity.

Despite Shut Down's impact on the hot rod song craze, in just a matter of months this fad too would be "shut down," stalled in its tracks by a far bigger trend that Capitol fortunately would also be at the forefront of: Beatlemania. So here's the album that launched a thousand shifts – a true auto audio artifact of its time.

– Ashley Warren

Special thanks to Bill Gagnon, Glenn Mendlinger, Aaron Striegel, Jason Boyd, Jennifer Ballantyne, Dennis Kelley, Domenic Priore and JonathanO'Brien.